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INFO RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 8584
RUEHNK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT PRIORITY 5964
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ALGIERS 000829

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TAGS: PREL AG MO WS

SUBJECT: ALGERIAN NEGOTIATOR SKEPTICAL ABOUT UPCOMING
WESTERN SAHARA TALKS

Classified By: Ambassador Robert Ford; reasons 1.4 (b, d).

ALGERIAN SKEPTICISM

¶1. (C) Abdallah Bali, former Algerian ambassador to the UN and now counselor to the Foreign Minister, told Ambassador and visiting NEA DAS Gray on June 10 that he would be part of the Algerian delegation attending the June 18-19 talks on the Western Sahara organized by UN Special Representative Van Walsum in New York. Bali said he was dubious that the talks between Morocco and the Polisario would lead to anything. The positions are very far apart and he saw no sign of the Moroccans -- or the Polisario -- being ready to make compromises. Bali speculated that the talks might only last a couple of days and then end in acrimony.

¶2. (C) Bali added that the American position of indirect support to the Moroccan proposal for autonomy was encouraging what he called Moroccan intransigence. Ambassador corrected Bali that the U.S. had never told the Polisario that it had to accept the Moroccan proposal. We had supported talks without preconditions. The Ambassador urged Bali to approach the talks as a serious opportunity, and not just a pro forma exercise. All sides would have to make concessions, Ambassador noted, and Bali nodded in agreement. The Ambassador concluded that if any party, including Algeria and/or the Polisario, walked out of the talks in anger it would diminish that party's credibility. Bali took the point.

¶3. (C) Bali wondered about the exact agenda of the discussions. He thought that for the talks to have any future they would need to address relatively how they would be conducted in the future and what the architecture of the negotiations would look like. Bali agreed with NEA DAS Gray's comment that these discussions in New York should also be sure to address real issues of substance.

POLISARIO COMMENTS

¶4. (U) At a June 11 press conference in Algiers, Polisario "Foreign Minister" Ould Sadek blasted the Moroccans as not being serious about the upcoming talks and called on "certain countries to review their policy" on the Western Sahara. He also underlined the importance of finding a political solution to the Western Sahara that guaranteed the Sahrawi people's right to self-determination.

¶5. (SBU) The press also reported Ould Sallek as saying that the Polisario delegation to the New York talks would be led

by Mahfoud Ali Beiba, president of the Sahrawi parliament, and would include Ahmed Boukhari, Polisario representative in New York; Brahim Ghali, Polisario representative in Spain; and Mohamad Khedad, Polisario "minister" in charge of relations with MINURSO. We issued visas this week to Beiba and Ghali. We also issued a visa to Bachir Radhi Sghaiar, counselor to the SADR "presidency," who told us he would be part of the delegation (and who was a member of the Baker Plan negotiating team). The Polisario embassy in Algiers informed us June 12 that their delegation would include six individuals (vice eight, as they had told us earlier in the week), and that all the others already had visas. The sixth member may be Mouloud Said, the Polisario representative in Washington.

FORD